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Building a Church

at Culp, Arkansas



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COVER PHOTO

Frank Horst preaching to an audience of old and young in a Sunday evening service held in a gas-lighted church near Culp, Arkansas. Horst, who has been working at Culp since 1941, says the Culp people do not sleep in church services.

Distributed Free

Building a Church at Culp, Arkansas

by

Glen and Lois Johns Yoder

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THE MENNONITE COMMUNITY



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FOREWORD

There is no real distinction between mission work and church work. A New Testament mission does nothing a living church should not be doing.

The work of the Mennonite Church in the Culp, Arkansas, area may, therefore, be called "mission work" or "church work." Both terms would mean the same. We need to get away from the professional idea of doing things. An editorial in *THE MENNONITE COMMUNITY*, from which most of the materials of this booklet are a reprint, said in the issue carrying the story:

"We are used to having things done professionally—even the work of Christ's church. The people of the world are hungry, so we send a check to a relief agency. People in our community have many kinds of needs, so we give to the community chest. The people of the world need Bibles, so we give to a Bible distributing agency. The people of the world need Christ, so we hire a minister."

The objective at Culp is to "build the Church of Jesus Christ." In our visions we see *churches* among the hills and valleys of northern Arkansas. We want church membership to mean something, to mean a life redeemed and revitalized in all its aspects.

Our program in this area is set up to serve this end. Direct evangelism and a vital spiritual ministry, followed by and expressed through a school, a medical, and an economic program is expected, under the blessing of God, to build redeemed and redeeming churches. These will be new communities, indeed.

For accomplishing these ends we need Spirit led men and women—men and women whose lives release spiritual power. We need love, sympathy, service, sacrifice and dedication. When we have these, the money needed to carry out the Great Commission will not be lacking.

J. D. Graber, Secretary,
Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities.

Building a Church at Culp, Arkansas

By Glen and Lois Johns Yoder

I. The Community of Culp, Arkansas

In the heart of the Arkansas Ozarks, thirty miles from a hard-surfaced highway and seven miles from a railroad station, is a small post-office-general-store by the name of Culp. The population of the town consists of one family, Mr. and Mrs. Otto Manthei and daughter, Vadene. Just about a quarter of a mile up Mill Creek stands the Bethel Springs Mennonite Church and across the creek and up the hill a few hundred feet is Bethel Springs Grade and High School.

These three—the post-office-store, the church, and the school—are the heart of the community for several miles around. It

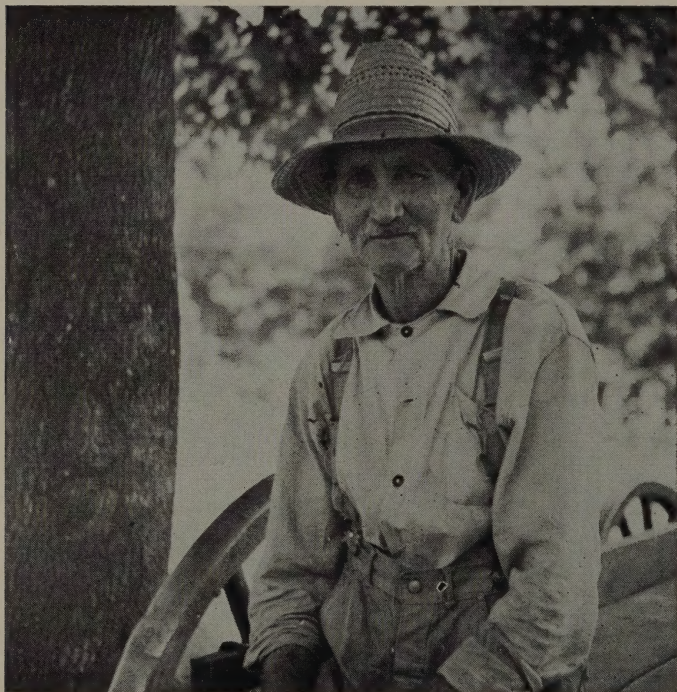


A post office and general store and a family of three make up the town of Culp in Arkansas' Ozark Mountains. About 270 people live within a four or five mile radius.

is, therefore, more realistic to think of Culp as a scattered community than as a town. If you were to drive through this country, you would wonder if there are any people living here. Few houses can be seen from the road, but there are a number of mail boxes there. Even these would never lead you to imagine that within a four or five mile radius from Culp there are living approximately seventy families, totaling about two hundred seventy people!

The People and Their Homes

These are mountain people. Most of them, except some of the older ones, grew up either here or in another mountain



John Douglass, husband of Maude Douglass, pioneer missionary in this field, remembers the stories of the community's Civil War experiences. There were shortages of salt; both armies raided the area.

community. They have a decided mountain accent or brogue in their speech, which some visitors are slow to understand. Their expressions and idioms are unique and colorful, and a newcomer must listen intently if he wants to be sure to catch the meanings of them.

One of the fine characteristics of the Ozark Mountain people is their friendliness and hospitality. They are glad to share what they have; the lack of furniture and conveniences is balanced by an abundance of hospitality.

Many homes have open fireplaces. The houses are built of unmilled lumber and are unpainted. During the past few years many homes have been made more attractive and warmer by



James Pool, Old Joe Route, Calico Rock, Arkansas, drawing water from the farm cistern. There are some cisterns but very few wells in this area. Water is supplied almost entirely by springs.

being covered with brick roll siding. Hand-hewn roof shingles are common. All heat their homes with wood and have kerosene lamps. Water is supplied almost entirely by springs. There are not many cisterns and very few wells. There is one large dam about thirty miles away and another large one is being built not farther than fifty miles away. These dams are supposed to supply all the needed electricity for miles around. An electric line is to come through soon.

II. History of the Mission Work

In the early 1920's a Mr. Buckingham and his wife, Maude, journeyed from Arkansas to Colorado seeking a climate that would offer physical relief for Mr. Buckingham's illness. They had gone as far as La Junta when he grew worse and could go



Three sisters, called in from play to take this picture, embellish the fine stone masonry done by Tillman Lester.

no farther. He was taken into the Mennonite hospital at La Junta. There he was led to a saving knowledge of Christ and he and his wife were received into the church. Soon after, Mr. Buckingham died. Maude stayed on at the hospital and worked to pay for the hospital bill. Here she received her inspiration to be a nurse. She then went to Hesston for her high school training and returned to La Junta and took nurse's training. Her desire was to return to Arkansas and serve her own people.

The First Sunday Schools

In 1930 Maude Buckingham returned to Arkansas. Later she was married to John Douglass and in 1932 they moved to the Culp community. Immediately Sister Maude began work-



Maude Douglass, devoted to serving her people, asked often for some Mennonite minister to come and preach for the people, but none came until 1935.

ing for the Lord. In those first years she held Sunday schools in various schoolhouses. Quite a story could be written describing the opposition, the problem of drink and other problems which she faced. When opposition grew too strong in one school district she went to another. She served her people in every way she could. She ministered to many aching bodies; she acted as doctor and nurse to many babies and never lost an obstetrical case. She asked often for some Mennonite minister to come and preach for the people, but none came until 1935. In August, 1935, Brother Earl Buckwalter came and preached several sermons. He went back to the South Central Conference and reported the need and opportunity as he saw it. The Conference appointed a committee to investigate and take up the work as they saw best. In September, 1935, Brothers J. R. Shank and L. J. Miller held the first evangelistic meetings at the Table Rock School, a mile and a half from Culp. They also filled appointments at the McPhearson and City Rock schoolhouses.



The church at Optimus, a branch of the Bethel Springs congregation, meets in a schoolhouse twelve miles from Culp. The Frank Horsts have been in the Culp area since 1941 and the Lord has used them in a great way in the salvation of souls.

The First Members

Then for nearly a year there were monthly appointments and an occasional series of meetings. Casteel and New Hope school-houses were added to the above-mentioned meeting places. There were some confessions. After instruction of converts, the first baptismal services were held October 13, 1936. There were baptized, Mr. and Mrs. Will Taggart and Mrs. Alice Freeman, one was received by confession, Mrs. Viola Wheat, and one was received by letter, Mrs. Maude Douglass, making the first membership of five. During that year a few others were added.

Erecting a Church Building

The need of a church building was soon felt. Joseph Emmett, then owner of the Culp store, offered to sell a small warehouse (which needed to be moved) for use as a church building. He also offered to give a plot of ground to set it on. Later the deed for the ground was made but the warehouse was not bought. Brethren came from Kansas to help erect the building, which



The Bethel Springs Church, dedicated in 1947, was built with the help of people from congregations in Kansas. After the foundation was put in, the workmen knelt in the center and offered prayer for the blessing of the Lord.

was to be built of logs. After the foundation was put in, the workmen knelt in the center and offered prayer for the blessing of the Lord on the building about to be erected. By this time all agreed that it would be better to try to secure lumber instead of logs for the building. This was found and the building was erected in the spring of 1937. The following April a dedication service was held.

First Regular Workers

Monthly appointments continued until Nelson Histan was secured for the work in the spring of 1938. A home was built for him and his wife that summer on the ground adjoining the church property. Their coming and work helped the interest and attendance at Sunday school and church. With the help of mission workers, the Christians in the community, and various evangelists, God added both young and old to the church. The membership as recorded in the **Mennonite Yearbook** is as follows:

1936	5	1943	22
1938	12	1944	32
1940	28	1945	42
1941	22	1946	53
1942	22	1947	53

Extension Work

Soon it was felt that more extension work in the communities near Culp should be done. Then the General Mission Board decided to subsidize the work of the District Mission Board by giving a regular allowance as soon as another family could be located in the area.

In 1941 Frank Horst and wife were secured for the field. A home was built for them one mile east of Culp. Here they have faithfully worked since that time. They have been used of the Lord in a great way for the salvation of souls.

In 1944 Nelson Histan felt led to make a change of location and climate with his family. They moved to Pryor, Oklahoma, to shepherd the flock there. This left Frank Horst alone. He was unable to do the planned extension work, since the work at Culp demanded his full time.

However, the work was strengthened from time to time by various teachers who taught in near-by schools. Richard Shwalter, Grace Bergy, and Mae Strubhar taught at the Casteel and Coldwater schools.

From July, 1944, to July, 1945, Mae Strubhar was stationed here as a helper in the mission work. She has charge of the mission home vacated by the Histands.

The Christian Day School

The necessity of a church school was felt by those burdened with the responsibility for building up the community morally and spiritually. On the first Monday in September, 1944, school opened in the church building with twenty-four children enrolled. The teacher was Dorothea Martin of Glen Flora, Wisconsin. The attendance that term was about ninety per cent, which is exceptionally good here where children are accustomed to going to school when they feel like it and staying out to help at home and for other reasons.



Children at the Bethel Springs School enjoy the combination swings, rings and bar set provided for their recreation by a church in Iowa. The work at Culp, as does all church work, moves forward as Christians see the need and give for the Lord's cause.

The desks for the children were simply wide boards hinged to the backs of the church benches. The room was too small and too dark. But in spite of the many difficulties, outside interest and co-operation in the school was good. Parents and friends helped with financial donations and otherwise. In November the General Mission Board voted to grant \$50.00 a month to the school, since it was a mission project.

School was held in the church two more years. In July 1945, Paul H. Martin and his wife Dorothy came to Culp and occupied the mission home. Brother Martin was principal of the school and taught the high school class, the ninth grade being offered. He also had charge of the Bethel Springs congregation. Dorothea Martin taught grades 1-4 and Dorothy Horst grades



Summer Bible school children of Culp, Arkansas, at an outdoor worktable. A Summer Service Unit worked with these children at the Curtis Mountain lumber camp where there is no Sunday school and few have transportation to religious services.

5-8. For reasons of health, the Martins returned East during the fall of 1946.

During the 1946-47 school term, Marie Kaufman was acting principal. She taught the grade school, assisted first by Edna Douglass and then by Russell Pool. Dorothy Horst and George Holderman taught the high school classes, the freshman and sophomore years offered.

The New School Building

From the very beginning of the school, the need for a separate building was felt. The church house was too small and dark and it lacked adequate playground space. The school (books, cupboards, materials, etc.) conflicted with the church services.

The first contribution for the school building came from Earl Wyatt, a member here who was working in Iowa. The need for such a building was presented to the church at large by several articles in the **Gospel Herald** in 1944. Finally at the South

PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

**Prayer is the mightiest weapon we can find;
Prayer makes us patient, understanding, kind;
Helps us to right decisions, clears the mind;
Prayer changes things.**

**Sense of God's nearness stirs us when we pray;
Prayer strengthens us for duty day by day;
Transforms our lives, sheds light upon our way;
Prayer changes things.**

—Clara Simpson.

The new Bethel Springs school which takes the place of three buildings: a schoolhouse, a teacherage and a mission home. The first floor has three rooms: one for grades one to four; the second for grades five to eight; and the third for a large assembly room, used for the daily worship period and for public meetings. The rear of the assembly room is used for a high school classroom.

There are two apartments on the second floor. One is occupied by the women teachers and the other by the principal and his wife. This floor includes a library-study hall and a small classroom. The room to the right, (below) showing George Holderman supervising study, is now occupied by grades one to four.

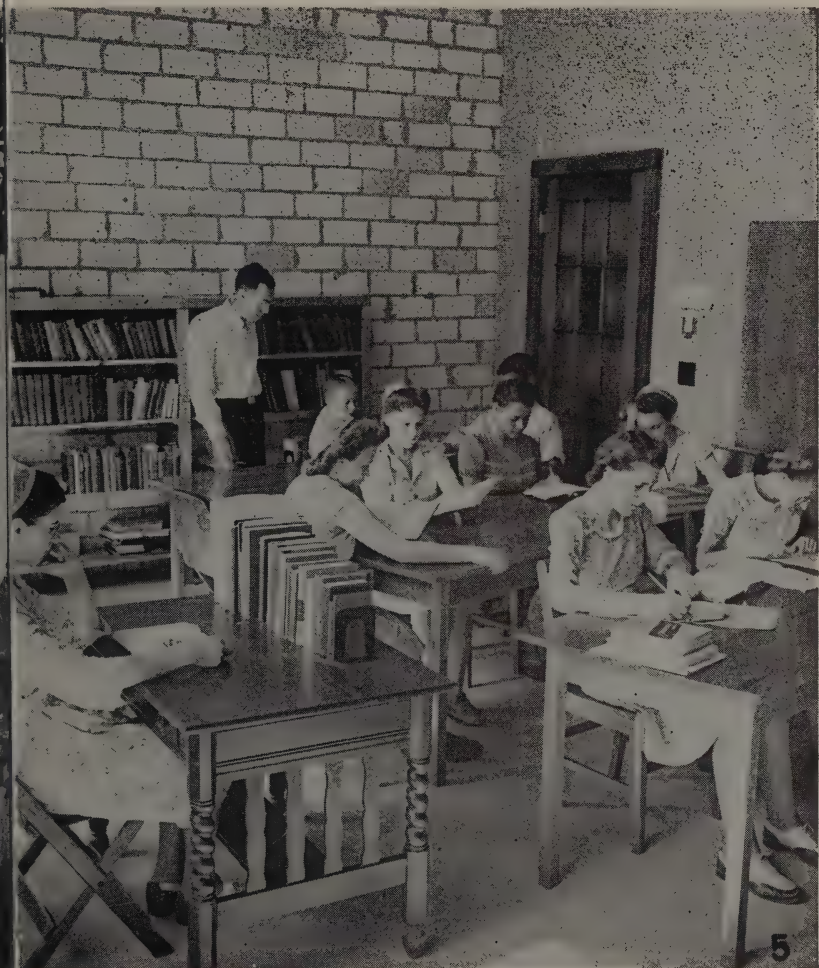
The basement of the building, not yet completely fitted, has a shop to



teach the boys industrial arts and a large home economics room to teach the girls cooking and sewing. Included are boys' and girls' lavatories and a laundry-storage room.

The building is heated by butane gas, wired for electricity and piped for running water. A 3000-Watt Kohler electrical plant was installed recently, a donation by a brother in Pennsylvania.

In the words of Glen Yoder, principal and pastor, and his wife: "The Lord has provided this fine building. But it takes more than a building to make a Christian school: it takes consecrated workers and teachers. These, too, the Lord has provided. . . . the teachers are willingly participating in the total mission program . . . planting the Word of God into the heart of each pupil."



Central Conference in 1945 the Mission Board decided to erect a school building. The necessary priority rating was secured at about the same time and the construction was begun in the fall of 1945. By the next spring the building was up to the first floor.

General Board Takes Over

Originally the building was planned as a one story building with full basement. Another small building was to be erected as a teacherage. However, the mission home burned in April, 1946, and the General Mission Board, when it took over the Culp work in June, 1946, decided to add a second floor and make on it two apartments. These are occupied at the present time by the lady teachers and by the principal and his wife. The finishing of the building is in charge of John Detwiler, who came in January 1947, as building supervisor.

The school building was finished sufficiently to open school in it in September, 1947. The teachers for the 1947-48 school term were: Mae Strubhar, grades 1-4; Marie Kaufman, grades 5-8; Dorothy Horst, Miriam Nolt, and George Holderman, grades 9, 10, 11. Glen Yoder came to Culp in August, 1947, to be principal of the school and pastor of the Bethel Springs congregation.

The high school courses are scheduled for a four-year rotating basis, so that the entire four years of high school may be offered with a minimum of courses each year, requiring probably only two teachers.

III. Contributing Factors in Community Building

We as Mennonite Christians are interested not only in winning people to Christ but also in building in them a Christ-like character. One of the ways to do this is by having a strong Christian community. Although our work at Culp is young (only 10 years since the first resident minister came), we have begun to build here a Christian community.

The Church

What are the factors that should help the Culp community into a strong Christian community? First, there is the church.

It is of primary importance. This is a mission station and its main purpose is the saving and building up of souls. Without this the community would not have the proper dynamic to hold it together, for first and uppermost in community building is the regeneration of the individual. The community will be given new life only in the measure that individuals in the community are born again and are serving the living Christ.

In connection with the church there are different avenues of service which have contributed to the extension of the Gospel. The summer Bible school has been a definite help in the teach-



Mrs. Alice Freeman, a convert, and son Claude, aged four, in the family storage cellar. The Culp area has excellent truck gardening soil and climate. With care, cultivation and fertilization a large variety of fruits, vegetables, berries and melons can be grown.

ing program of the church. As in other places, it has reached into homes untouched by the regular Sunday to Sunday services.

Since 1945 there has been a service unit in this area each summer. Their work has been summer Bible school work, home visitation, general repair on mission buildings, summer camps, etc. Their help has relieved the physical and mental strain on the regular workers.

Home visitation has played a great part in the church work. We are convinced that much visitation work is one of the "musts" if we are to reach some of the homes in this community. The people need to feel that we are interested in them personally, not just in the program of the church.

Evangelistic meetings have been frequent. These people especially welcome that type of meeting and no one knows just how much good has been done through them.

Literature distribution has also played a prominent part in the work here. Most of the people can read. One of our faithful



A summer Bible school, conducted by a Summer Service Unit, was held in the Curtis Mountain lumbering camp. God is laying His hand upon the youth of the church today and His spirit is calling Christian young people into areas such as this for soul-winning.

members who has already passed on was led to a decision while reading a tract. Several others were brought face to face with Christ and led to make a decision for Him by literature placed in their hands.

The workers here have always had the reputation of general helpfulness. Frank Horst is known for miles around for his kind helpful spirit. Keeping a child for a day, doing a washing for a family with illness, lending a hand at cleaning out the chicken house during a visit—these and others are not unknown deeds of helpfulness.

ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN of the



Work Administered

FOREIGN	HOME	INSTITUTIONAL	RELIEF
1. India Mission Central Province Bihar	1. City Denver Kansas City Chicago Detroit Ft. Wayne Lima Canton Toronto Peoria	1. Hospital La Junta Elkhart	(Mennonite Relief Committee)
2. Argentina Central Argentina Chaco	2. Spanish Mexican Border La Junta Chicago	2. Nursing School La Junta (Goshen-Elkhart)	1. Belgium 2. Ethiopia 3. (India-China—workers only)
3. Puerto Rico Pulguillas Valley La Plata congregation	3. Rural—Culp Arkansas Church School Health Service	3. Old People's Home Eureka Rittman	SEWING CIRCLE AUXILIARY
4. China Hochwan		4. Children's Home Kansas City West Liberty	1. General Organization 2. District Sewing Circles

A Teaching Program

The second factor that should help build a strong Christian community is our Christian Day School. The forty-one students enrolled this year represent twenty homes. These children are being taught Christian ideals in a Christian atmosphere, and inevitably some of it will go along home with them. Their morning prayers, the prayer before the noon meal, the daily chapel, the regular Bible study, and weekly student prayer meetings make indelible impressions on pliable young minds. These children are our most effective means to reach some homes.

Health Service

The third factor that should and has contributed to the building of a strong community is the health service rendered. The work originally began with this avenue of helpfulness. Sister Maude has done health service since she came in 1932. Doctors are scarce and far away. There are two doctors at Calico Rock,



The home of John Detwilers. John is building supervisor and Mrs. Detwiler serves as a combination nurse and community social worker. Both teach Sunday school classes and help in the mission activities.

one is old and crippled; the other has all the cases he can handle when he is there. Mountain Home is thirty miles away. There is no doctor on this side of the White River. Therefore, a nurse here must do more than an ordinary nurse. Sister Maude is getting older and due to her physical condition is not able to do what she once did. However, she is still doing much valuable service to the community. Mrs. John Detwiler (the former Mary Wenger, missionary to India) came to this community in January, 1947, to render both physical and spiritual aid. Plans are being formulated for a combination home-clinic for the Detwilers on the site where the mission home had stood. The doctors are in favor of this plan. Several have said they would be glad to come over to this community for a clinic occasionally if they had a place to work. It is hoped that this health clinic will make more easily available to the people of the community both preventative and curative medical aid at moderate prices.



The Tillman Lester farm once grew cotton. It now grows alfalfa, a kind of cane, soybeans and tomatoes. Chickens are also raised; berries are picked. Most of the people in this area have some livestock and produce pork, beef or cream for market.

Farm Service

The fourth factor that can help in building a strong Christian community is farm service. We are hoping to have someone of our Mennonite brotherhood to come in and help establish some source of income for our people. A brother from Virginia has put at the disposal of the General Mission Board a farm near Culp to be used as an experimental-demonstration farm. The possibility of a canner with supervised truck gardening is being considered. Another brother has manifested interest in starting some kind of a shop here.

J. Howard Kauffman stated in the article "Transforming a Wilderness into a Thriving Community" in the March, 1947 issue of **The Mennonite Community** that four factors led to the success of the Fairview community: "(1) There was a strong determination of a number of people to make success out of



A familiar scene near Culp. For family use, horses are very practical for most of the people. There are some excellent riding horses in this community.

failure. (2) There was the presence of devout leadership both in the ministry and among the lay members. (3) There was a readiness to obtain expert help and guidance for the solution of agricultural problems" and "(4) There was a strong realization that a strong church cannot be developed without a satisfactory degree of economic stability." He stated that "The Mennonite community does not need great wealth, but it does need economic security. A community struggling to maintain its own existence has little vitality left to be of Christian service in regions beyond."

It is our firm conviction that these four factors must be realized in order to make our community at Culp a strong community. Our community differs from Fairview in that it is not made up of people with Mennonite background and experience. The people here are willing to learn but need help and guid-



Some excellent crops can be grown on the cleared land. The slopes are sometimes too steep for plowing but the land is fertile because of recent clearing of lumber.

ance for the solution of their own agricultural problems. The community now does not have the economic security it needs to make it a strong Christian community. It is a community persevering to maintain its own existence.

"How do the people make a living?" That question is often asked. There is not one main occupation. Their cash income is not large. They raise most of their food. Some raise farm crops. There is a little cotton raised. Most of the people have some livestock and a number have flocks of chickens. Pork, beef and cream are produced for market. Quite a few work in saw-mills part of the time.

In the fall many of the families migrate to the cotton fields of southern and eastern Arkansas and attempt to make enough cash to tide them through the winter. Some of the men go to the wheat harvest in Kansas in the summer. Another summer occupation is fishing for mussels—an animal similar to the oyster from whose shells pearl buttons are made. None of these occupations furnishes a great deal of cash.



The mellow, thin soil is sandy and some patches are very rocky. Despite this, tomatoes or corn can grow on a hillside covered with rocks averaging at least two inches in diameter. The stones keep the hot sun from drying out the moisture.

IV. The Land and Transportation

From sixty to one hundred years ago many people moved into this community. They came mainly from the mountains of Kentucky and West Virginia. They were both industrious and thrifty, as pioneers need to be. They found the timber large and beautiful. This not only furnished building material but also a source of income. They cleared the land and produced good crops. Cotton was the main crop and there was a cotton gin at Culp. Besides this, there was good hunting and fishing.

But now the natural resources are depleted and have not been replaced. There is still considerable timber but not enough to provide a living for all the families. The high war demands and prices have stimulated the cutting of all trees large enough to furnish any lumber. Much of the land now owned by private individuals will not furnish another good cutting for at least twenty-five years. Hunting and fishing are not profitable enough to furnish a source of living income.



Pioneers moved into this community sixty to one hundred years ago, harvested the lumber and produced good crops. There is still considerable timber but insufficient to provide a living for all the families.

The land no longer has its original fertility. Not too rich to begin with, the constant, year-after-year cotton growing soon made it poor—too poor for profitable cotton growing. The mellow, thin soil is sandy and some patches are rocky. We wonder sometimes how tomatoes or corn can grow on a hillside covered with rocks averaging at least two inches in diameter, but they do. All the cultivated land in this mountainous country is in small patches.

Since soon after the turn of the century the government has been buying all the land in this section that people will sell for \$3.00 per acre and returning it to timber. Much of the land that is now in timber and has large pines on it was once under



Russell Pool cultivates his corn field with a one-horse cultivator. All the cultivated land in this mountainous country is in small patches and no longer has its original fertility.

cultivation. One of the men not long ago pointed to a field of large pines and said, "I used to play ball there." On this government land, known as the Ozark National Forest, there is good timber and supervised cutting.

Possibilities of the Land

Even though depleted, there is reason to believe that the soil can be built up. The growing season here is long; generally there is sufficient rainfall. Last year, however, the community suffered a drouth and the rainfall was eighteen inches below normal. There are excellent gardens here in the spring. Peanuts grow well.



Jim Perry, the ferryman at Shipp's Ferry between Mountain Home and Culp. These cable ferries, operated by the river current, are the method of crossing the White River for about 100 miles.

The type of soil and climate make it impossible for the land here to compete with Iowa corn fields or Kansas wheat fields. The land needs a rest from cotton growing; a new cash crop must be developed. Since much of the land is fit for grazing, dairying may also be developed. All land in cultivation must be fenced in, for there is open range for livestock. Almost every family has from one to six cows for milk, cream and butter. Some raise beef cattle for market.

Roads—Ferry

The roads in this National Forest are good for mountain roads, thanks to the W.P.A. and C.C.C. of fifteen years ago. Before 1930 roads were very poor; only a few Model T's were able to make the grades. Some farms were and still are almost unaccessible by automobile. But the main roads were made into good gravel roads and are now maintained by the government forest service.

To get to the nearest railroad station (Calico Rock, seven miles away) or bus line (Mountain Home, thirty miles away) you must cross the White River on a ferry. Often you may need to wait twenty minutes to an hour before being put across. You may even need to sleep in the hotel at Calico Rock all night if you arrive there on your way to Culp much after sundown. Sometimes the river is too high and swift for ferrying; other times it is too low to permit the ferry to cross. At such times people can go across on a row boat or motor boat, but vehicles cannot cross. This all adds to the spice of mountain life.

THE CHALLENGE

This is a picture of the Culp community. How thankful we are for the challenge it places before us! Our first and primary obligation is spiritual: all our efforts should be bent towards the salvation of souls. We are not trying just to educate people, or to heal the sick, or to give them economic stability; we are endeavoring to lead them to Christ and to help them grow in grace. We are confident that God's grace and wisdom are sufficient for our every need.



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